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THE
VIEW and CONDUCT
OF A
MINISTER of the GOSPEL,
REPRESENTED IN
A SERMON

Preached at LEWIN'S-MEAD, BRISTOL,
MAY 28, 1776,

In an Assembly of Protestant Dissenting Mi-
nisters of different Denominations,

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By JOHN WARD. K

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S E R M O N, &c.

I. Cor. x. 33.

Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

A DESIRE to please others appears natural to mankind, or at least is very general among them. It may arise in some degree from the selfish part of our nature, which finds it's own account in being agreeable : but surely is to be ascribed not a little to the benevolent tendencies and affections. It may be a combination of both ; for there are many cases, in which according to our celebrated Poet, the wise and good Creator " bade self love and social be the same." It is moreover a cultivated and improved disposition in the virtuous man and the Christian. But where men do not really abound in it, the appearance is frequently put on with politic and self-recommending views, or as an ornament of distinction. This complaisance or good breeding hath been called artificial good nature, and fails not to please by it's resemblance of the true. But an unaffected and cordial desire to please and profit at once, especially to promote the most important in-

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terest of our fellow creatures, is surely the most generous and virtuous of all social and friendly dispositions. Before us it stands in our text in the temper and character of the apostle PAUL, a sanctified, a noble, a christian benevolence.

It will not be improper here

I. To enquire into the real view and meaning of the first clause of these words, *Even as I please all men in all things.* And then

II. To consider the end to which this was directed.

I. To enquire into the true sense and design of the first clause of these words, *even as I please all men in all things.*

This clause taken separately and in the gross, may possibly have a wrong and dangerous sense put upon it. A passage very similar in the foregoing, ix. 22, *I am made all things to all men*, hath been sometimes quoted with ridicule by those who are not well-wishers to Christianity, or had too light thoughts of it: while perhaps some ignorant Christians, or such as seek pretences, may extend these words too far, in excuse of their own unlawful compliances. But I will venture to say that the apostle Paul, neither there, nor in my text means, that it was his principle or his practice, to go beyond the line of what was just and right, to gain the favour of any man, either to himself or the good cause he was engaged in: that he does not intend to represent himself as addicted to flattery, servility, or insincerity; as acting a double part or a mean one; as having any sinister views of his own, or promoting the religion of Jesus, by measures unworthy of an honest man: or in any degree *doing evil that good might come.*

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For, would he then have acknowledged and avowed the part he acted, yea have made a merit of it, and set himself forth for an example? Yet the latter is the very design of my text, as connected with the foregoing 32d verse. Can we believe him so weak and foolish a man as to say 'I have little principle of my own, no determined rule of behaviour, but am one thing to day, another to-morrow, at the beck of every man's opinion, humour, or prejudice, and only careful to fashion my teaching to my hearers, my manners to my company?' Would a person of common sense ever own so culpable and base a part, especially to such a church as the Corinthian, where there was so strong a party against him?

But that he could not mean this is evident from what he says expressly to the contrary, and to these very Corinthians, 2. Cor. i. 12. *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to your words.* And in Ch. ii. 17, *for we are not as many who corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.* Acts xx. 31, he says to the elders of Ephesus, *remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* Warnings are not the most pleasant things. And where can there in fact be found a plainer speaker than the apostle PAUL, in urging men to their duty, correcting their mistakes, reprovng their faults, expostulating with them by every argument, yea using awful threatnings when the case required it? The two epistles to the Corinthians alone will afford us ample instances of these things. He would not gratify the false taste of his hearers, by preaching
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to them with *wisdom of words*, whether the philosophy and rhetoric of the Grecian schools, or any Jewish Rabbinical learning, when he saw it would take their faith off from its true foundation, and abate their regard to the plain facts, and doctrines of the Gospel: *but determined not to know any thing among them but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* 1. Cor. i. 17. 2. Cor. i. 6. And as to any unworthy sense which might be put upon such an expression as that in my text, he utterly renounces it. Gal. i. 10. *Do I now persuade (rather obey) men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ.*

The *all things* therefore in my text in which he *pleased all men*, must necessarily be understood of all things innocent and lawful. No one could go beyond him in kind compliances, in every condescending and obliging method in order to do good, as far as conscience and duty permitted. Particularly,

(1) In making the full use of his own liberty, and in a very cautious behaviour, out of regard both to Jews and Gentiles. Where we have not direct assertions concerning himself, the rules he gives to others may serve to teach us how he squared his own conduct. In the foregoing 14th verse he says, *dearly beloved flee from idolatry*, and the sum of his advices amounts to what follows; but the more judicious christian who knew that an idol was nothing, and that meat offered or devoted to an idol was neither better nor worse on that account, might therefore partake of it, without scrupulous enquiry, as a common meal—but that he should not sit at meat in the idol's temple, where he might be understood, both by Heathens and Jews, as joining in the impure sacrifice and worship—nor should he any
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where else eat of meat, even brought out of the market, if a weak brother should inform him that it had previously been devoted——lest this most scrupulous person should be disgusted at him, or at christianity itself, or should be encouraged and drawn in by his example to do the like, when he could not fully justify it to his own conscience. Instead of ridiculing or despising such an one's doubts and fears, our good apostle would forbear the (in itself) innocent indulgence of the table. *If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat (in that circumstance) while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.* 1. Cor. viii. 13. What tenderneſs ſhould this teach us to tender conſciences !

The apoſtle moreover well knew, that all religious obligation of the ceremonial law, over the Jews themſelves, had then ceaſed——nevertheleſs it does not appear, that this was carried ſo far, as to make the obſervance of former rituals unlawful to ſuch believers among them, as could not get rid of their old attachments, and whoſe conſciences would have been pained, at going into a practice ſo contrary to all their former habits both of thinking and of living. *There were many thouſands (myriads or ten thouſands) of the Jews who believed, who were all zealous for the law.* Acts xxi. 20. Theſe two therefore were reconcileable and conſiſtent in a Jew, who could not ſee the whole of his chriſtian liberty. So our apoſtle expreſſly declares, 1. Cor. vii. 18, *Is any man called being circumciſed? let him not become uncircumciſed,* or renounce his Judaism. Was then ſome occaſional ceremonial compliance unlawful in the apoſtle PAUL, himſelf a Jew : and did he not act an honeſt and commendable part in it, when it ſerved to no leſs an end than to prevent ſuch prejudices in his

his countrymen against him or others, as would have entirely destroyed their usefulness among them, or to take off unjust charges that had been brought against himself? Therefore he caused Timothy to be circumcised because born of a Jewish mother, and condescended, at the remonstrances of James and the Elders at Jerusalem, to purify himself in the Jewish manner, to take off the odium of a false report, that *he taught all the Jews which were among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.* Acts xxi. 21. Wherein PAUL teaches that these things were lawful to a Jew: and what he permitted to others might he not innocently do himself, and even laudably for the profit of others; tho' if he had been the only person concerned he would much rather have let it alone?

In like manner he did not permit the Gentile Christians to insult the Jewish, for their deep and rivetted distinction of meats and days. Rom. xiv. And under this consideration, how justly might he say as in this, 1. Cor. ix. 20, 22. *to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews—to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might save some.* But on the other side *to those who are without the law, he was as without the law.* i. e. to the gentile Christians. For he was a zealous asserter of their freedom from the Mosaical institutions. To have taught or allowed them there, would have been to subject them to an heavy burden, and most probably forever to incorporate Judaism and Christianity together, to the great debasement of the latter. This appears to be the great and necessary distinction to be observed in this matter, and among the Gentiles, PAUL would
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no doubt use all the liberty which he had taught them. The only restraint laid upon them was, not to give any unnecessary offence to the Jews, by too bold and careless a use of things lawful, among them, nor to shew any thing of a contemptuous behaviour towards them. And this is the sum, *give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God: Even as I please all men in all things.* But in this conduct he did not act without principle or rule, but *under law to Christ.* Ch. ix. 21.

(2) In his mild, gentle and humble behaviour. How great the dignity of the apostolic office! We may see what a figure the pretended successor to Peter hath made with it. And there were those among these Corinthians, who could bare insult; 2d epistle, Ch. xi. 20, where probably refering to the false apostle, the seducer among them, he says, *for ye suffer or endure it if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.* But of himself, 1 Col. ii. 3. *and I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,* words which denote a solicitous care not to give them any offence, but to act the most humble part for their welfare. And concerning the party which there was in this Church against him, it cannot in common sense be supposed, that he would venture to assert any thing to them in his own vindication, which would not stand the test of their own knowledge concerning him.

It would have been well for the christian church in later ages, if there had been no occasion to suspect men of being puffed up with the idea of clerical power and dignity of office. Tho' this may sometimes

times meet with a tame deference from ignorant and fervile minds, it will hardly fail to give disgust to the more liberal, and to provoke the more irascible. But PAUL's general character and manners may be learned from many passages, Acts xx. 18. *serving the Lord with all humility and many tears.* And to the Thessalonians, *we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.* 1. Theff. ii. 7. And if this be not seeking to please all men, and a noble and powerful way of doing it, I know not what is.

(3) In his general prudential methods of discourse and action, and suiting himself to times, persons, and circumstances. Much of this kind may be seen in his different manner of address and argument to Jews and Gentiles: in his applying himself generally first to the former, whose prejudices required this distinction, and who might be supposed from the Old Testament, and their expectations of a Messiah, to be naturally best prepared to receive him. And tho' PAUL had no dependance upon the other apostles, yet we find that when he came up to Jerusalem among them, he very respectfully and prudently communicated *his gospel* (or that particular doctrine of freedom from the law which he preached among the Gentiles) *privately to them who were of reputation,* to wit, to PETER, JAMES, and JOHN, *lest by any means, says he, I should run in vain.* Gal. ii. 2. 9. As instances of the same prudent concern for the success of his ministry, we might observe, his respectful, but different manners of address, to Agrippa and Festus, Acts xxvi. 2. 25. and his very genteel and condescending epistle to PHILEMON.—How little he studied his own profit, may be farther seen in his generous giving up that maintenance from the churches, to which he had a right, to dispose their
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minds the better to his ministry. *We have not used this power, but suffer all things lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.* 1. Cor. ix. 12. *Yet so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, but I have used none of these things,* verse the 15th. He thought himself happy that he had a trade which enabled him to support himself by his own hands. To which might be added,

(4) His various labours and sufferings, of which the catalogue would be long. These may not indeed seem so directly calculated to please as to profit. But surely they were powerful addresses and motives, to the esteem, the sympathy, and the gratitude of those for whom he laboured and suffered. These he connects with the former, and all may be placed in a great measure to the account of the objects of his ministry. 2. Cor. vi. 3. *Giving none offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed. But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.* And in 2. Tim. ii. 10. *therefore I endure all things, for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.* Which brings me to our second head of enquiry, viz.

II. Wherefore the apostle acted this very self-denying and compliant part. *Not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved.* Here two things offer themselves to our notice ;

(1) An intimation of, or reference to, a certain method for men's salvation :

(2) The profit or value of the salvation itself, which made the apostle so desirous of saving others.

(1) An intimation of, or reference to, a certain method for men's salvation. The apostle's pleasing others was in order to *gain them*, as it is expressed,

ch. ix. 19. To gain them to what, but to the religion of Jesus; his aim was to make them true Christians, upon that general plan which comprehended alike both Jews and Gentiles. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature*, or the new creation taking place in the heart and practice. Gal. vi. 15. That divine constitution of things by which *we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. Eph. ii. 10. That pursuant to the gospel plan, and in consequence of those new and extraordinary aids which God had given for the reformation and recovery of a sinful world, and forming a more peculiar and holy people to himself, they to whom this apostle preached, should come heartily and entirely into the obedience of faith, and a conformity both to the doctrines and laws of the Messiah's kingdom. That if Jews before, they should no longer trust in the privilege of their birth, in circumcision, or any legal or ceremonial observances; but that sensible of that demerit and guiltiness which was in some degree common to them as men, but in an high degree their general character, they should thankfully accept of the newly offered grace and forgiveness of God to the believers in his Son, and put themselves upon that righteousness and justification, with true repentance and fruits meet for repentance. Had they before been a part of the heathen world—*henceforth they were not to walk as other Gentiles walked, in the vanity of their minds, alienated from the life of God, and giving themselves up to lasciviousness, or vice of any kind; but putting off this old man of their former conversation, they should put on that new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, or holiness of truth*, Eph. iv. 17. 25. The apostle wanted to make good men of them,
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christians indeed, such persons as are capable of enjoying future blessedness, and by the grace of God given in the gospel intitled to it. But the words plainly imply the necessity of such qualifications in them; that with all his good will and generosity he could not otherwise give them any hope of salvation; that with all his indulgence and yeilding he could grant them no dispensation on this head; that with his warmest wishes, and most assiduous endeavours for their benefit, he could no other way effectually promote it; and therefore all his views, his affections, his labours tended immediately to this one point, their being made the sincere disciples and servants of Christ. Oh, there is no saving those who will not themselves be saved! You cannot go to heaven without your own consent, your own compliance and determination. He wanted to gain upon their wills, *he persuaded men, he besought them to be reconciled to God; he preached Christ warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* Col. i. 28. He recommended every kind of real virtue and goodness to them, with the like holy earnestness and affection, as Peter exhorts the brethren *to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, by adding to their faith, fortitude, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; for if, says he, ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* 2. Pet. i. 5. 12. Had it been enough for these Corinthians to have believed in Jesus, and made the christian profession; had mere acts of trust and reliance on Christ, without the fruits of repentance and righteousness, and leaving them as sinful as ever,

been sufficient ; had it been enough for them to have joined with the assemblies of christians, and attended upon the institutions of the gospel ; had it been enough for them to have borne a motely character betwixt good and evil, and with favorite and prevailing sins—the thing had been soon done, and their salvation easily secured—it were then scarcely to be accounted for, that this apostle should labour in every persuasive and winning way to influence their minds and conduct aright, and give up so much of his own ease and pleasure for their good. But all his spirit and behaviour plainly point out his sense of the necessity of the means, as well as of the greatness of the end.

It is the observation of a modern writer of eminence, “ that it seems to be the uniform intention of Divine Providence, to lead mankind to happiness in a progressive, which is the surest tho’ the slowest method—that mankind should be as far as possible self-taught, that we should attain to every thing excellent and useful as the result of our own experience and observation, and our hearts be instructed by their own feelings.” In the productions of nature, nothing comes to maturity or perfection at once. Men must be qualified for employments in life by instruction and use. And should not the art of happiness be learned before we can practice in it ? A soul, with an entire new consciousness, would be a new person, and heaven is not intended for a state of reformation, but of improvement. The foundation for future happiness therefore must be laid in a good and holy discipline in this life. Can any hope to rise to perfection immediately from the lowest state of ignorance and sin ? That perfection indeed hereafter is only comparatively such, perfect compared with

with the present state, but will itself be for ever advancing. But must not they be utterly unqualified, even to set out upon it, who have sunk and perverted all their rational and moral powers, and are probably even less prepared and fitted for a spiritual life than if they never before had lived at all? For mere children are sooner taught good, and more naturally come into it as their faculties open, than bad men are untaught the evil they had before learned and contracted. There is a certain meetness for salvation requisite, *as a man bath sowed so must he reap*. Christianity itself, the word of salvation, doth not save as a charm or an arbitrary and undistinguishing gift of happiness, or of a title to it, but requires acceptance and obedience, faith, patience and holiness *that we may inherit the promises*. Every true lover of souls therefore, like this apostle, must be highly concerned that *Christ should be formed in them*, both by their belief of his doctrine and obedience to his commands. His labour was to make them wise and holy to salvation. And this may justly be looked upon as the most important thing in the world. There is a certain road that looks and leads upward; a path to the skies. To set their feet in it with their faces thitherward, by means of all the discoveries and aids of the christian religion, was this holy preacher's great immediate object, and in carrying this point, he speaks of himself as *gaining and saving men*. 1. Cor. ix. 19 and 22.

Therefore I proceed,

2dly. To touch upon the end itself, the ultimate end, *the profit of many that they may be saved*. The words, *they may be saved*, are here, no doubt, to be understood in the highest sense. The same as James expresses, *to save your souls*. Ch. i. 21. and PAUL calls

calls the *salvation which is by Christ Jesus, with eternal glory*. 2. Tim. ii. 10. This was the great, ultimate object which PAUL had in his eye for other men as well as himself. We have reason to believe that the high opinion he had formed of this end of his ministry, was no more than just. PAUL was no visionary, as may most evidently be seen in his writings and conduct; but his head and judgment were as clear, as his heart was warm. An enthusiast neither could have reasoned so well, nor would probably have humbled himself so much, pride being more generally an ingredient in that character, nor would have exercised that extremely prudential, as well as kind and benevolent manner and carriage which he did. Yet if any man, he had enough to exalt him above measure; for he had been favoured with a glimpse of the heavenly glories; had been caught up into Paradise; had heard the unspeakable words. But what then? Doth this lead him to a contempt of others as far beneath him in divine favours, or doth he not come down, as it were, from these upper regions with a soul all fire to make them known, as far as they might or could be made known, and in a temper to catch every one by the hand and lead and draw them thither? His labours and sufferings proved his sincerity, and that it was scarce possible he could pretend such things from worldly motives, or mean any private, carnal interest, from an affected concern for the welfare of others. No: "*We believe, saith he, and therefore speak: knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you*". 2. Cor. iv. 13.

Now, though the apostle doth not need our justification upon this head, yet it may not be useless to touch upon a few particulars, which may lead our senti-

sentiments into the same train with his, and help to shew for what reasons he valued the salvation of souls so much.

(1) May it not be justly concluded, that intellectual and moral perfection was the grand and ultimate design of the Deity in the creation? In other words, that to produce and communicate that happiness, which flows from knowledge and holiness, was the end for which all things were by their Almighty Author brought into being. Can we imagine that the inanimate and insensible parts of the universe were made for their own sakes: that the ground was laid, the waters were to run, and all the vegetable world to grow for any manner of use to themselves? Proceed a step higher to the animal creation; which is supported by the former and enjoys them. Here, while we see some evidently ordained to be the food of others, yet do we not find them in general subjected to the dominion and use of man, and some species, which seem to approach the nearest to rationality, more peculiarly serviceable to him? For whose sake principally doth the sheep wear her wool; hath the horse his strength or speed; or is the ox so fit for labour and tillage while living and for food when dead? If all these creatures receive some benefit from their existence, yet were that enjoyment of their own the only or chief thing intended by it, why are they so evidently fitted for a further end, and their happiness and their very existence so dependent on the will of another order of creatures!

If we come up to man, are not the powers of his mind evidently his chief distinction and glory, which give him all his preheminance over the brutal world? And doth he not find from long and constant experience

rience, that the state of his mind hath a most essential influence upon all his enjoyment and happiness? It needs no long or laboured proof that knowledge, that self-complacency and satisfaction, that social and benevolent affections, that the sense and exercise of piety and virtue, that good prospects for the future, that the whole course of intellectual and moral improvements, that our ability to reflect on what we see, to make new discoveries in nature or in religious truth, and to rise from things visible to invisible, and to repose on God himself, are of far higher estimation in the scale of happiness, than what we have in common with the meanest reptile, or all that is comprehended within the narrow sphere either of sense or of mortality. In brief, souls are the noblest works of God; thinking beings at the head of this lower world with a capacity of enjoying pleasures so much better, as their natures themselves are better.

If we ascend above ourselves even to the angelic and celestial state, so far as we can conceive, the difference appears to be rather gradual than specific, more in degree than kind. They are spirits, they are minds wise, holy and happy; and happy because they are wise and holy. They, no doubt, have divine wonders to contemplate, and divine services in which they are employed. The highest orders of these, or of beings of some like nature to these, must, so far as we can conceive, be at the very summit of the creation. Man may attain a share of *their* blessedness, is formed to come up after them; and though, at present, at the lowest step of the ladder, is far from being inconsiderable. To support and serve him in the pursuit of these ends, all the world he inhabits and rules was most probably brought into being. How great and excellent must that object be, which all other

other things were created for! As well the world might be destroyed or had never existed, as that souls should be universally lost. Their salvation is the most valuable and important thing in the world.

The sanctifying men by the gospel of truth might well, on account of it's importance, be called the *New Creation*, making men over again, raising them to the true life, the end of the other, restoring them to themselves, and the most valuable uses and ends of their being. Where this then takes effect, how great the benefit! Where it fails, how great the loss! Were there but *one bad man* in the world, and he universally known, all the rest would lament over him as the most miserable being in it. And I repeat it, that the world itself would be little worth supporting (unless for reference to some further systems and ends) were mankind universally to perish by sin, or to live altogether and always in it.

2dly. The consideration of the happiness itself included in the idea of salvation, might justly warm this apostle's mind to great earnestness that many might be saved. If we drop the view of the sad reverse, which the scriptures set out in amazingly awful and terrifying terms, and behold this salvation only in the actual and positive light, it is a most great and glorious object. With what force doth our author speak of it and his own expectation of enjoying it, as *an exceeding and eternal weight of glory! pressing forward that by any means he might attain to the resurrection of the dead.* The scripture views given of the heavenly blessedness to considerate and serious minds, are really enchanting. To see and know God, to be like him in purity and perfection, to be companions of Angels and of Jesus Christ, to ascend far beyond their former selves, and not only above
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every trouble and suffering of life, but above all which men call great and happy in it, to have eternity ever before them, an eternity always full and new as if but beginning, and which can never lessen or decay, to join the innumerable company of blessed perfect spirits, and all our most valuable former relatives and friends, to bear the image of our Saviour in celestial glorified bodies, and for every subject of his kingdom to wear a crown of glory that fadeth not away——surely this is to be wished for, this is great! and every soul enlarged with the truest benevolence must think, that to lead others to this is the greatest good he can ever do them. It is to raise mortals to immortality, and a creature of the earth into a son of God!

3dly. For souls Christ died. PAUL was much touched with this thought: He could not but love and value souls which his Master had loved so much. It is not only an argument for the gratitude and holy rejoicing of the sincere believer, but to men in general to pass the time of their sojourning in solicitude and fear, that they were *redeemed by the precious blood of Christ*. 1. Pet. i. 17. and an argument of truly benevolent persons to have the spiritual interest of others in high estimation. All our Saviour's life, his constant discourses and instructions had this point principally in view. "*These things I say that ye may be saved.*" John v. 34. All his deeds of charity and kindness were meant to contribute to this still greater mercy: and all his humiliation and sufferings bore witness, how much it was his errand and desire *that men might not perish, but have eternal life*, So great and divine a character came among us, doing and voluntarily enduring such amazing things for an end which can be thought lightly of; how is it possible?

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One would think that men who make little of this object, can never have read the New Testament.

It were pity a stately building should by some shock or accident fall into ruins, when brought with much labour and cost very near to perfection. It were a sad sight to see the precious fruits of the ground, on which we depend so much, and which had painful and expensive husbandry bestowed upon them, all laid waste and destroyed, after they had appeared fair and promising for maturity and abundance. It is ever a lamented event, that fine and hopeful youth, after much careful and judicious education to fit them for life, should be taken out of it when just ripe and setting out for action and usefulness. But that the labours of the Son of God should be in vain, that those seeds of blessedness which he hath sown should be lost; no fruit, nor reward of the travail of his soul in many persons, may cause a sensible indignation and grief in the spectators of such an abuse and loss, and awaken our earnest endeavours if possible to prevent it. If all could not or would not, yet was it the apostle's solicitous attempt that *many* might be saved. Even heaven appears with added charms, if seen in the life and death of Christ. The gospel history, though told with much simplicity, contains a series of wonders, and "*great is the mystery of godliness.*"

I would now conclude this subject with a few thoughts by way of

A P P L I C A T I O N.

First remark, how necessary it is to study the scriptures carefully, or to be open at least to any more exact and critical enquiry into them made by others,

others, as the means to take off doubts and objections. An ill sense may at first glance be put upon some passages, and unbelievers have frequently shewn a disposition to take such an advantage, but upon a farther search the difficulty and absurdity will be found to lie in the objector's ignorance or mistake, or in some faulty reading or mistranslation, and not in the sacred text itself. Many things of this kind have already been discovered, which gives reason to hope that others may; if any real or considerable difficulties do yet remain.—As to the matter before us, PAUL has been misrepresented, censured, ridiculed as a time-serving, obsequious, and even dishonest man, for what was altogether an upright, and at the same time a most amiable and benevolent condescension.

2dly, How fit an instrument did God choose in the apostle PAUL. No doubt there was that teen in his original frame, which rendered him peculiarly fit to be separated for the apostolic commission; and there was certainly that in his life preceding his ministry, which made him an exceedingly proper person to be so employed. His zeal for *Judaism* was happily changed into equal or superior ardour for a nobler cause: his former honesty of intention might prepare somewhat for his better direction and employment of it: not improbably his foregoing mistakes and violence might have a share, and may come into consideration, in forming him to that exceeding humility, tenderness to the consciences of others, and candour to their mistakes, as well as to that vast diligence and most fervent earnestness to do good, which are so conspicuous and eminent in his writings and in his behaviour. His being a *Roman Citizen* was no inconsiderable circumstance, as by that means he

he and the gospel were made known in the palace of the empire. Princes are often judged of by their choice of persons to serve in eminent stations under them. And is not this a proof and instance of the wisdom of the divine œconomy and conduct of things, in propogating the christian religion?

3dly. Should not this subject and example recommend all useful condescension, charity and gentleness on our part? We may be called into scenes which afford occasion for them. There may be circumstances and affairs in which it will do good to yield and to oblige: and in common, a moderate, unassuming and gentle behaviour is most pleasing to others, and most ornamental both to religion and to ourselves. Most differences come from pride and stiffness, and have more or less of them. *But he that shall humble himself as a little child, or even as a servant, shall be great in the kingdom of heaven.* If this spirit of holy PAUL were to enter deep into us, how much better and happier in many respects would our conduct be. This mind prevailing will greatly contribute to a most desirable peace and harmony in our several societies. Farther, abroad it will preserve us from despising and censuring one another. We shall respect each other's integrity and piety amidst our different sentiments and forms. religious controversies will be amicable enquiries after truth, and moderation will be held a virtue.

4thly. This subject and occasion lead me as far as time will permit to offer something in relation to the christian ministry. We may upon the views before us in our measure, my brethren, *magnify our office*, as the best and most useful of all employments: and our own hearts should be in it. Upon the same views we shall seek the good of our people more than
interest

interest or authority, and usefulness beyond popularity and applause. I doubt not many of us are pained at heart, under a sense of the little good we do; but still I hope we do some: and things would be much worse without us. Let us not be discouraged—You know enough to animate—Let us take all the honest, prudential, and condescending methods we can to gain and secure the good will of our people; and for this end especially that we may be profitable to them. Our zeal may be revived and doubled by our considering the greatness of the cause. And may we not hope for the good will of our congregations in these services? Surely, my christian friends, the ministry as designed to serve you in your very best interests, hath no ordinary claims to your esteem and affection. As dissenting ministers what have we but this, we mean as to present views, to encourage and support us? And give me leave to say, that we see with patience the high dignities and large revenues, held out from another quarter, pass by us at the price for which they are offered. In our way we put ourselves out of the possibility of aspiring to them: and yet several among that no great number who have left us have found some of the best of them attainable; while many no less eminent for literature and accomplishments have chosen to remain where they were, notwithstanding considerable preferments were offered them.*

Conscience, my friends, I am verily persuaded is our general motive, and we have a high sense of the cause in which we are engaged. If we would have the institutions of CHRIST pure according to our own judgments;

* As Mr. Baxter and Dr. Bates; and in our time, the Doctors Dodbridge, Chandler, and Fleming.

judgments; if we would that ourselves or others in the ministry should avoid solemn professions of what we or they cannot think or mean: if we would maintain the real and sole authority of CHRIST himself in his church; if we would have our own and your natural and unalienable rights of judgment and of conscience, and exercise a BIBLE religion and worship—all, in our views of things, require such ministers and such societies as the non-conformists. And with these it is very well known and allowed by some * not greatly our friends, that the civil liberties of this nation have been closely connected, and by them principally supported. So that we do really look upon the dissenting interest, with whatever may be equivalent to it, or of the like kind in other countries, as the most valuable cause in the world.—Judge as charitably of others as you can: leave them entirely to their judgment: that is our principle: there have been and are very good men in all communions who see things in different lights; but I would hope that you behold them in these. Will

* “ The same bold and daring spirit which accompanied them, i. e. the Puritans, in their addresses to the divinity, appeared in their political speculations; and the principles of civil liberty, which, during some reigns, had been very little avowed in the nation, and which were totally incompatible with the present exorbitant prerogative, had been strongly adopted by this new Sect. Scarce any sovereign before Elizabeth, and none after her, carried higher, both in speculation and practice, the authority of the crown; and the Puritans (so these sectaries were called, on account of their pretending to a greater purity of worship and discipline) could not recommend themselves worse to her favour, than by preaching up the doctrine of resisting or restraining Princes.—So absolute was the authority of the crown, that the precious spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved by the Puritans alone; and it was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous and habits so ridiculous, that the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution.”

Hume's History of England, v. 5, p. 161, 189, 8vo.
or Reign of Q. Elizabeth, ch. xi.

Will you not then be stedfast to your principles : will you not be hearty in encouraging, promoting and supporting them ? Is it a matter of indifference what profession you make ? Is nothing more easily parted with than conscience, truth and principle, for interest, honour, fashion or humour ? Rather glory to be on the right side, though on the smallest ; and to follow Christ if you do it almost alone.

And will you not *bid us God speed*, and contribute to keep up our hearts in the work ? We frequently labour under many and great discouragements. Give attendance on our labours and ministrations. Be willing to be instructed, and grant a candid hearing to evidence. Oh ! that we could see you reformed from every evil practice, and come into the whole of an unblamable, - holy, and christian conversation. Let us have the enjoyment of our own consciences : let us not be hated, molested, or slighted for the profession of our sentiments or not professions of another's. Be favourable to our deficiencies : for we can not all, nor the same persons always, do as well as we would : and we are conscious we sometimes preach to our superiors. In brief, let us see that your hearts are with us ; that we strive together for the faith of the gospel and the promotion of true christianity.—And, brethren, pray for us : We have need of grace, and so have you! And,

5thly. That thought which I would wish to leave much upon your hearts and mine, is the vast value and importance of our salvation.—Which will necessarily infer the importance of true religion likewise as conducing to it. These principles heartily embraced and considered will have great effects. I mean not to lead you to any severe or unnatural mortifications : to an extravagance of zeal or devotion :
to

to forsake your lawful worldly callings, nor to give all your goods to feed the poor; though heaven at this rate would be no bad purchase. But alas! how few make it their real object; how few apply to religion as business, or seem to order their common and general walk with an eye to futurity. This nevertheless should be your governing bent in life: this should run into all your conduct. Then will you abhor every practice of intemperance, licentiousness, and sensuality! then you will not think of amassing riches, or raising yourselves in life by any unrighteous arts or sinful compliances. The very desire of these things will be cautious and moderate; and you will behold the splendours of life not with admiration, but comparative indifference. Will you then be easily carried away with the evil manners of the age, your minds being dissipated and great part of your time consumed in play and diversions, life a mere round of vanity, death unprepared for, and your hearts seldom or never at home? Will you not be more disposed upon the view of things this subject hath given to attend the Lord's supper; which too many, I fear, forbear chiefly because too serious for them: will you not be ready according to your ability to *give much alms and pray to God always*? Will you not endeavour to communicate serious impressions of religion to your children: *train them up in the way they ought to go*, and seek to dispose of them in life in such a manner as may be favourable to piety and virtue, as much as to their worldly prospects? And will you not cheerfully fall in with, and generously contribute to, pious and useful purposes, and be ready to every good work? Yea, to borrow another's words, "conscious of the dignity and importance of this immortal principle, the *soul*, labour

“bour and resolve to secure it's happiness whatever
 “present gratifications are to be resigned, or what-
 “ever temporal sufferings are to be endured to that
 “end.” “*looking,*” for there all must be placed at
 last, “*for the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” the
 mercies of God given us in and by him, “*unto eter-*
 “*nal life.*” Amen.

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